



**SUMMER
FALL
2005**



From the President

Dear Neighbor,

I've always felt that budgets are much more than just a mountain of numbers "crunched" at regular intervals to keep the gears of government in motion. Budgets are moral documents. You can pretty much judge government at whatever level by whether they put their money where their mouths are.

From the start, I wanted a County budget for the fiscal year that began July 1 that would be both fiscally and morally responsible. Guess what? That's exactly what the Council delivered.

The budget approved by your County Council reduces property taxes by \$86 million to the Charter limit and cuts the County Executive's proposed operating and capital budgets by \$54 million while supporting needed investments for the school system, Montgomery College, public safety, and services for vulnerable County residents.

The County Council approved a property tax fairness package that will give property tax relief of about \$300 to the average County homeowner and includes three separate property tax fairness measures.

The Council lowered the property tax rate by four cents per \$100 assessed valuation, which will save the owner of a home assessed at \$400,000 about \$180 in property taxes. Every County homeowner will also receive a credit of \$116 on their property tax bill. Also, under a Council-initiated expanded "circuit-breaker" tax credit, homeowners with incomes lower than \$55,000 can receive additional targeted tax relief based on the first \$300,000 of their home's assessed value – tax relief that would average \$900 per household for those eligible, which is four times the current average credit.

County residents have spoken loudly and clearly and the Council has listened. I want to thank each and every County resident who called, wrote, and emailed us with their view of what was important to do.

People understand that continued investment in critical County needs is necessary. And so we've funded truly needed improvements in the schools and college, in our police, and in our social safety net.

We carefully reviewed the budget. We have funded the "gotta-haves" and – make no mistake – many of those "gotta-haves" are things to help those that are less fortunate or dealing with hard times in their lives.

We are providing our schools with \$1.6 billion, a 7 percent increase over last year. Included in the schools budget are initiatives to expand full-day kindergarten to 20 additional schools, reduce class size guidelines in elementary schools by two students, reduce oversized classes in secondary schools, and add assistant principals in 15 elementary schools.

We are investing almost \$5 million – a \$3 million increase — in "Montgomery Cares," which provides health care to the uninsured in our midst and, in FY06, will begin to provide

dental services. We continue to invest in our critical partnerships with the non-profit community. We are providing County funds to replace grants funds for the operations of the Children's Assessment Center, which provides specialized medical exams and services for children who are victims of abuse. We are enhancing in-home aide services to seniors to reduce the waiting list.



The Council also made a nearly \$7 million "down payment" in new spending on a backlog of needed infrastructure and deferred maintenance of County facilities identified by a Council-initiated County task force chaired by Councilmember Marilyn Praisner. Building new things is fine, but not if we give short-shrift to maintaining the facilities, roads, streetlights, and parks we already have.

We are expanding materials for the new Rockville and Germantown libraries.

This budget boosts police spending by \$18 million – or 11 percent – and adds 34 new positions. We are also spending \$710,000 to increase staffing and improve response times at five County firehouses.

As part of the budget deliberations, the Council ended the nearly two-year-old "Carry-In, Carry-Out" experiment that removed trash cans from most County parks. The Council directed the Park & Planning Commission to replace trash cans needed to deal with refuse in the parks.

And we've done all this in the face of promises broken and unfunded mandates passed along by the state and federal governments. Governor Ehrlich has cut 1,300 Montgomery County children and 600 pregnant women off the Medicaid rolls. President Bush is seeking to cut funding for adult education by 70 percent and has already slashed federal housing assistance to low-income County families by \$4 million. The trail of state and federal broken promises grows longer and longer. Local governments are left holding the bag as a result of this abdication of fiscal and moral responsibility.

The buck stops with the County Council to craft a budget that makes sense for the County. This budget funds important programs, cuts spending we can do without, and reduces the property tax burden on County homeowners. Working together, we have a budget that is, indeed, morally and fiscally responsible.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to do this important work.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Perez
Council President

Investing In Our Community... and Property Tax Fairness



"If we shortchange our schools, we shortchange our future. It's as simple as that.

"That's why the Council continued its critical support for our public schools and for Montgomery College, even as the state reneged on \$12 million in promised funding.

"We are providing our schools with \$1.6 billion, a 7 percent increase over this year. We are expanding Council initiatives to extend full-day kindergarten to 20 additional schools and to reduce class size guidelines in elementary schools by two students. We are reducing oversized classes in secondary schools and adding needed assistant principals in 15 elementary schools.

"We are providing virtually full funding for Montgomery College, including the expansion of the College Institute Program. Montgomery College will see a 10.7 percent increase in its budget under the Council's budget. The College is critical to our economic development in the County and helps thousands of students to realize their God-given potential."

~ **Councilmember Michael Subin**
At-Large



"We have to give our Police and our Fire & Rescue workers the resources they need to protect our families and our homes.

"This budget boosts Police spending by \$18 million – or 11 percent – and adds 34 new positions. Gang prevention is important. That's why we committed to shared funding of a joint Prince George's/Montgomery County Opportunities Center.

We have funded a violence prevention coordinator and we are bringing on a Police Sergeant to better coordinate the efforts already underway in the Police Department and develop new strategies to address emerging gang problems.

"We added \$710,000 to increase staffing and improve response times at five County firestations. We must serve the new and growing parts of the County as well as making sure that staffing and apparatus in the more established parts of the County are ready to respond when there is a medical emergency or other call to 911.

"We provided the needed funding for public safety while assuring significant property tax relief at the Charler limit."

~ **Councilmember Phil Andrews**
Rockville, Gaithersburg, North Potomac,
Washington Grove, Derwood



"With housing prices and rents rising throughout the County, a decent place to live at an affordable price can be hard to come by. Many people who work in Montgomery County can't afford to live here. One result: longer commutes – and more traffic congestion.

"That's why the County Council approved an all-time high of \$18 million for the Montgomery Housing Initiative Fund. The fund, established by the Council in 1989, provides loans to the Housing Opportunities Commission, non-profit organizations, property owners, and for-profit developers to build, acquire, and preserve affordable housing and revitalize older County neighborhoods. It also assists first-time homebuyers. "Higher property taxes also make housing less affordable. At my initiative, the Council approved an expansion of our circuit-breaker property tax credit for homeowners who may be 'house-rich' but 'cash-poor'. Across-the-board tax relief is important but I wanted to be sure we also targeted relief to seniors and others living on fixed or limited incomes who need help the most."

~ **Councilmember Steve Silverman**
At-Large



"Montgomery County may boast one of the highest per-capita incomes in the country but the proverbial rising tide hasn't lifted all of Montgomery's boats.

"That's why the County Council is working to strengthen services to the most vulnerable County residents. People depend on us to lend them a hand with effective and timely assistance.

"We are investing almost \$5 million – a \$3 million increase — in 'Montgomery Cares,' which provides health care to the uninsured.

"We are replacing a \$441,000 federal grant that has expired so that women can continue to receive substance abuse treatment. We are continuing to increase our local investment in the Drug Court, which will help some of our revolving door offenders deal with their addiction and prevent their return to the criminal justice system.

"We are providing County funds to replace grant funds for the operations of the Children's Assessment Center, which provides services for children who are victims of abuse. We are funding 24/7 coverage by adult protective services at the Crisis Center to best handle emergencies from vulnerable adults."

~ **Councilmember George Leventhal**
At-Large



"It does the County little good to be building shiny, new facilities if we can't take good care of what we already have.

"I chaired a Council-initiated inter-agency task force earlier this year that identified as much as \$700 million in deferred infrastructure and maintenance in the County – roads, buildings, lighting, tree-trimming, and more.

"The Council made a \$7 million 'down payment' in new monies against this backlog. That means more resurfacing of roads, maintenance of ballfields and parks, and replacement of roofs and sidewalks and guardrails.

"And this is just the beginning. We have to keep better track of what we have. And we have to keep focusing on these needs.

"Maintenance of County facilities is a little like maintenance of our own homes. Some stuff you can defer but with others, it's 'pay me now' or 'pay much more later.' "

~ **Councilmember Marilyn Praisner**
East County



"The Council acted to bring discipline and common sense back to the budget process. We set priorities and showed it was possible to fund all programs at their existing levels, provide increases for our most critical services, and still live within the Charter limit on property taxes.

"The Council cut the property tax rate by 4.2 cents, approved a \$116 credit for all homeowners, and expanded targeted tax relief to those on fixed incomes. All told, that adds up to about \$300 for the average homeowner – and much more if he or she is eligible for the targeted relief.

"While residents have generously given us the authority to increase their own taxes to pay for the services that take care of our neediest citizens and make our communities vibrant places to live, government should not mistake taxpayer generosity for taxpayer recklessness. We've got to get back to common-sense budgeting that promotes our core priorities, responsibly funds existing services, and respects the Charter limit. With this budget, we've done just that."

~ **Councilmember Michael J. Knapp**
Barnesville, Clarksburg, Damascus, Darnestown, Germantown, Laytonsville, Olney, and Poolesville



"Traffic congestion is the number one threat to our quality of life in Montgomery County.

"The good news is that, despite a tight budget and what I believe was a critical need to provide significant property tax relief, the Council kept a whole range of projects on track designed to give County commuters more transportation options.

"The truth is we need to do more of everything — improved roads and more transit. The Council gave the State our sign-off to move ahead with the Intercounty Connector, reiterating our consistently strong support for the master plan alignment. We increased the Ride-On fleet and expanded many bus routes. Funding for road resurfacing and tree maintenance was increased in addition to enhanced pedestrian safety programs. And we continued our partnerships with businesses in the County to encourage transit usage under our 'Fare Share' and 'Super Fare Share' programs.

"We didn't get to this level of traffic congestion overnight and alleviating our transportation woes won't happen overnight. But the Council is keeping our \$7 billion, 10-year program of traffic relief on track.

"A copy of the Council's 10-Year Transportation Plan is available on our website."

~ **Councilmember Nancy Floreen**
At-Large



"Budgets are always a battle between the services we love and the taxes we hate.

"We have delivered on significant tax relief for County homeowners and held the line on preserving our quality of life.

"I'm thrilled that the Council has done away with the ill-advised 'Carry-In, Carry-Out' policy that took trash cans out of most County parks. Saving money by ditching the trash cans was clearly penny-wise and pound-foolish – and picking up the trash is a core government function that most folks believe ought to be covered by the taxes we pay.

"Our County parks are a crown jewel. Thanks to the Council's wise investment in our green spaces, they will be available for us, our children, and our children's children to enjoy for years to come."

~ **Councilmember Howard Denis**
Bethesda, Potomac, Friendship Heights, Chevy Chase

Tax Relief for Those Who Need It Most ..

The Council greatly expanded the County's circuit-breaker property tax credit, designed especially for residents who may be "cash-poor" but "house-rich," so that more County residents can be eligible for an average of \$900 in additional property tax relief.

Here are the details on the circuit-breaker:

- You must own and reside in your own home. You must have lived in that home for 6 months or will live in it for 5 of the next 12 months.
- You may be eligible on the first \$300,000 of your home's assessed value if your annual household income is less than \$55,000.
- You must apply for the credit by September 1. You can file an application with the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT). You can contact them at 1-800-9447403 or visit their website at www.dat.state.md.us/sdatweb/htc.html.

Check out our expanded circuit-breaker property tax credit if you think you might be eligible.

Check Out Your County Council on the Web and on TV



Get more details on the County budget, the County Council, and all issues that affect your family. The information available includes agendas and schedules for upcoming Council sessions and committee meetings – and even detailed packets from Council analysts on issues before the Council. Check out the Council on the Web at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council.

On County Cable Montgomery (channel 6), you'll find full broadcasts of County Council sessions, plus many public hearings, neighborhood Town Hall meetings, and other feature programming. Check out the schedule listed on the Council website.

And you can tune into to County Cable Montgomery through the Internet —even if you don't have cable TV! Just go to the Council website for live coverage of Council sessions, public hearings, and more.

We've Got Your Number ... Clip & Save



The Montgomery County Council	240-777-7900
Abandoned Cars	240-840-2454
Animal Complaints	240-773-5925
Animal Shelter	240-773-5960
Board of Education	301-279-3617
Building Permits & Inspections.....	240-777-6210
Bus Schedules.....	240-777-RIDE
Child Care	301-279-1773
ChildLink (birth to age 5 information).....	240-777-1528
Circuit Court.....	240-777-9100
Community Use of Public Facilities	240-777-2706
Consumer Affairs.....	240-777-3636
County Executive.....	240-777-2500
County General Information.....	240-777-1000
County Attorney.....	240-777-6700
Crisis Hotline (24 hours)	240-777-4000
Drug Enforcement.....	301-840-2500
Emergency Police, Fire & Rescue	Dial 911
Environmental Protection.....	240-777-7770
Garbage Collection.....	240-777-6410
Fire Code Violations	240-777-2457

Housing & Code Enforcement.....	240-777-3600
Housing Opportunities Commission.....	301-929-6700
Land Records	240-777-9477
Library Telephone Reference.....	240-777-0001
Montgomery College—General Information	301-279-2560
Noise Control	240-777-7770
Park and Planning Commission.....	301-495-2525
Parking Violations	240-777-8740
Parks	301-495-2525
Pet Licenses.....	240-773-5946
Police Non-Emergency	301-279-8000
Property Tax Information	240-777-8950
Recreation Programs	240-777-6804
Recycling	240-777-6410
Recycling & Leaf Collection	240-777-6410
Refuse Containers	240-777-6410
Schools Information	301-279-3391
Snow Removal & Potholes.....	240-777-7623
Street Lights	240-777-2190
Zoning Information.....	240-777-6240
Zoning Complaints	240-777-6259